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Truth Bottled Up

General Tells Role In Bay of Pigs Plan

By BRIG. GEN.

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That absurdity of recent times — the Bay of Pigs — has been getting a great going over through the current summer.

But the truth about the Bay of Pigs stays bottled-up, if indeed the bottle has not been broken and its bits flushed into Chesapeake Bay by the 'official' custodians.

There was a time when this government felt the people had a right to know all and not just the parts that are good for them. But that old-fashioned idea died shortly after Korea. No full and responsible accounting followed the Bay of Pigs. There is no system for such concerning operations in Viet Nam and no one seems to want it.

How history becomes cheated in consequence can be seen in the current chronicles about the Bay of Pigs. The oracles are three — Dr. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., historian, Theodore C. Sorensen, special counsel, to

the late President Kennedy, and Richard M. Bissell, Jr., who directed the operation for the Central Intelligence Agency.

All are men of character, talent and integrity, true insiders who worked right next to the seats of the mighty, absorbed all the secrets through osmosis and therefore collectively should be able to give us the real low-down.

A pity, but the three accounts do not agree among themselves, and where they chance to coincide, their unanimity only raises questions that await answers. It appears as plain as a pikestaff that what the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not know about the operation the three oracles did not try to find out. Nor did they later exchange basic information with one another. Each writes as if from his own narrow track he could get the whole of it.

The two White House men are at one in believing that the operation was doomed from the beginning by too much wishful thinking on the part of all

hands. It is a conclusion worthy of their genius. Mr. Bissell contends that his plan missed success by a narrow margin, which means that he remembers mainly how three Castro planes blew up his expedition and forgets that he didn't have enough strength anywhere to afford him more than a Chinaman's chance.

In all three chronicles, the cancellation of the third strike against the Castro aviation by order of the White House is reexamined critically. Mr. Bissell calls it the fatal blow. The others say it was inconsequential — that the try was already irretrievably lost.

But the wholly curious thing is that all three discuss the first two strikes by the B-26s as if they were carried out exactly as planned. There is no mention of a last-minute disarrangement, to which cancellation of the third strike became a minor consequence.

So call another witness. These sentences are lifted verbatim from a full statement made to me by President Luis Somoza of Nicaragua on Feb. 2, 1962.

"I was the coordinator from this end. The strikes were mounted from our soil. The expedition was staged through here. I feel I am as responsible for the failure as was President Kennedy. My mistake was that I did not stop the expedition when I knew it was going fatally wrong. I could have done so. I am not a technician of war, but I know enough to see when technicians are going astray."

"On Thursday before the curtain went up, I got a call from CIA, Washington. I was told, 'We are moving up the first two strikes, 24 hours. They go Saturday instead of Sunday.' I objected vehemently for I knew the change spelled ruin. There would be no surprise. The air strikes and the landing

would be 48 hours apart. I tried to call the White House but could not get through. For a time I thought of cancelling the show on my own, but in the end I agreed to send the strikes on. That's why I feel guilty."

"About why the change was made, I was never told. My assumption is that it was done to test American public sentiment as revealed by press and TV reaction over the weekend."

Since Mr. Somoza is obviously telling the truth as he sees it, that leaves but two conclusions to be drawn: Either he was deceived all along about the operations plan or our three oracles, for reasons of their own, have omitted mention of the eleventh hour switch. In the end, there were only 11 bomber sorties out of 45 scheduled.

Mr. Bissell says outright that the exiles were told flatly that there would be no U.S. intervention, at which point he disagrees with Mr. Sorensen, who asserts just as positively that the high hopes of the exile brigade were pinned on the promise of direct U.S. support.

Mr. Somoza is worth quoting on that debate: "I took assurances from the wrong people — CIA agents. I thought they spoke for your government. You had carriers off our coast covering the buildup at Puerto Cabezas. I asked: 'Will they be prepared to support the invasion in an emergency?' The answer was: 'Certainly! My people even put Nicaraguan panels and symbols aboard the carriers in case of need.'"

"Part of my mission was to appear as 'pep talker' before the brigade training in Guatemala. In outlining our potential, I told the men that the U.S. carriers would intervene, if things went wrong. I misled them because I had been misled."

There is much more to the Somoza interview. Enough is quoted to underscore the main question: Does the nation any longer get dependable information on its most important affairs, and if not, as a free people, have a decent claim